(a) whether Government are aware of the heavy loss to crops in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra due to heavy rains and hailstorms this year in winter season;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) whether Government have provided any relief to the farmers of Vidarbha to compensate them for loss of crops due to this natural calamity?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI KANTILAL BHURIA): (a) to (c) Government of Maharashtra have informed that rains and hailstorms during January-February, 2005 caused crop loss, particularly in Amravati, Buidhana, Nagpur, Wardha and Yeotmal Districts of Vidarbha region. The area suffering damage exceeding 50% in these Districts is 3982 hectares. As per the standing orders of the State Gvoemment, Rs. 1000/- per hectare, limited to 2 hectares is payable in such cases. Funds for this purpose are already available under Calamity Relief Fund (CRF). Entire Central share of CRF for 2004-2005 amounting to Rs. 143.31 crozes has been released to the State.

Ministry of Home Affairs, being the Nodal Ministry, has so far received no Memorandum for additional assistance from the National Calamity Contingency Fund (NCCF) from the State Government.

Joint declaration by farmers' association

477. SHRI MANOJ BHATTACHARYA: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether about forty farmers' associations from across the country in a Joint Declaration in December 2004 have demanded a separate budget on Agriculture on the lines of General and Rail Budget;

(b) whether they have also demanded that "Agriculture" be transferred to the Concurrent list;

(c) if so, the details and other related demands made in the Joint Declaration; and

(d) the Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE (SHRI KANTILAL BHURIA): (a) to (c) A letter has been received from

Shri P. Chengal Ready, C/o Confederation of Indian Industry and Shri Sahat Mehta of Gujarat Pradesh Nationalist Congress Party in which the following issues have been* raised:

(i) Need for separate Union Budget presentation by Minister of Agriculture.

(ii) Need to consider inclusion of Agriculture in Concurent list.

(iii) Government should take steps to prepare National Agriculture Index.

(IV) Transport cost for agriculture produce and other allied products be subsidized (both for inter-state transport and overseas transport).

(V) Disinvestment in public sector and reinvestment in irrigation sector.

(vi) Reorganizing Commodities Boards and establishing new Commodities Boards.

(d) Agriculture being a State Subject, the State Government is responsible for implementation of policies and programmes for development of agriculture in the States. The Union Government recognizes its responsibility towards the agricultural sector. Steps are accordingly undertaken and plan provision made to enhance agricultural production and productivity through various Schemes and Programmes to raise the Income of farmers and for augmentation of their living standards. The plan allocations cover crop production programmes, marketing reforms and creation of marketing & storage infrastructure like godowns and cold storages, soil and water conservation, on Farm Water Management to provide irrigation facilities in Eastern India, plant protection measures, cooperation. horticulture development and promotion of high yielding varieties of seeds. The Department of Agriculture and Cooperation also handles issues related to international trade of various agricultural commodities. In view of this, there is no need for a separate budget on agriculture on the lines of General and Rail Budgets and for its transfer to the Councurent List.

Alternative strategy for compensating drought affected farmers

478. DR. PRABHA THAKUR: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.